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SUBJECT: KUWAIT HOSTS SUCCESSFUL WOMEN LEADERS IN SCIENCE
CONFERENCE

11. (U) Summary. The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), in conjunction with the State Department and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, hosted a conference entitled "Women Leaders in Science, Technology, and Engineering" from January 8-10 in Kuwait City. Participants included women scientists and engineers from 22 countries across the Middle East and North Africa, including delegates from Iraq and Turkey. The U.S. delegation, headed by U/S Dobriansky and OES A/S McMurray, included women CEOs, university presidents, and NASA astronaut Janet Kavandi. In his speech during the opening ceremony, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, speaking on behalf of the PM, said Kuwait encourages women to enter scientific fields, and noted that expanding women's roles is part of the GOK's plan for diversifying its economy beyond oil. Local and regional media outlets covered the conference heavily, filming much of the opening ceremony. Astronaut Kavandi was popular with the press, and U/S Dobriansky highlighted U.S. democracy-promotion efforts in an exclusive interview with a Kuwaiti Arabic-language daily. Ambassador LeBaron spoke at the opening ceremony and hosted a reception for all participants at the end of the conference. (End summary)

12. (U) From January 8-10, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the Department co-hosted a conference entitled "Women Leaders in Science, Technology, and Engineering." The conference, held under the patronage of Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, was sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and was held at the headquarters of the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development. Participants were drawn from twenty-one Arab countries and Turkey. Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said in opening remarks that Kuwait has played a leading regional role in encouraging women in the sciences, and encouraging women to take greater roles in all areas of society is part of the GOK's vision for the future. He said the GOK's plan to "transform the economy from oil-dependency to human-resources dependency will provide new roles for all citizens, especially women." In his remarks following the FM, the Ambassador stressed the importance of networking among individuals and institutions for sustaining the momentum and quality of scientific work in the region, and encouraged participants to use the conference as a springboard to future collaboration.

Wide Local and Regional Press Coverage

13. (U) Kuwaiti, regional, and pan-Arab media were well represented at the conference. Al-Jazeera Direct, Al-Arabiya, MBC, and CNBC-Arabia filmed the opening ceremony and keynote speakers on one or all days of the conference,

and all aired 10-15 minute segments on the conference the evening of Monday, January 8. Regional print media included MENA, Al-Hayat, and Al-Sharq Al-Awset. All six Arabic-language and three English-language dailies as well as the state news agency KUNA sent reporters to the cover the conference on all three days.

¶4. (U) Media coverage focused on the conference's aim to increase women's participation in the sciences and the obstacles they face, as well as the goal of building ties with U.S. and regional counterparts. The Kuwaiti media stressed Kuwait's role in advancing science and the Prime Minister's comments (delivered by the Foreign Minister) on Kuwait's aim to move from an oil economy to one based on human capital. Astronaut Janet Kavandi was particularly popular with the press. PA arranged for her to appear on the popular morning talk show "Good Morning Kuwait," and her 15-minute segment included clips of her space missions and a discussion on her role at the conference. Kavandi also conducted a press roundtable discussion with local and regional media. PA also arranged for U/S Dobriansky to conduct an exclusive interview with Kuwaiti Arabic-language daily Al-Rai. The reporter focused discussion on women's issues such as education and participation in elections. The U/S also addressed the U.S. view of democracy promotion around the world, particularly in the Middle East. U/S Dobriansky and A/S McMurray both presented papers at the event, and held a number of bilateral meetings with senior Kuwaiti officials, (septels).

Building Networks and Next Steps

¶5. (U) Topics for the conference sessions ranged from

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discussions on overcoming social barriers faced by women scientists to presentations highlighting best practices for encouraging women to enter the sciences. U/S Dobriansky delivered a well-received speech on building science partnership networks, and NASA's Kavandi discussed her experience becoming an astronaut in a session on breaking barriers, including short films of her training and spaceflights that were a hit with the assembled participants.

On the afternoon of Day 3, the conference split into workshops focusing on proposal writing, research funding, publishing, and scholarships, respectively, each moderated by a senior member of the U.S. delegation. In a panel discussion on next steps, which included A/S McMurray, participants stated their interest in further meetings on advancing regional scientific networks. The Ambassador hosted a reception for all conference participants at his residence at the conclusion of the conference on Wednesday evening. The Ambassador urged participants to be in touch with U.S. embassies when they returned to their home countries, in order to share their impressions of the conference and talk about next steps to enhance cooperation.

Next Steps

¶6. (SBU) The conference was well-organized and covered a large range of complex issues affecting women scientists and educators. GOK support was strong, (including picking up the tab for virtually all conference and travel expenses), with the PM and FM's involvement helping to draw press coverage as did holding the event at the exquisitely-appointed Arab Fund building, which lent significant grandeur to the event. The atmosphere was very positive among participants, especially among younger attendees, students, and the North African delegations. The ambitious agenda covering so many topics resulted in several sessions running over their allotted times, which generated some grumbling as it often cut short time for Q&A. One suggestion for future events would be a more narrow topic focus which would free up the schedule to

allow for more devoted Q&A time. The conference was a pathbreaking and unique forum for bringing so many regional women scientists together, and represented an excellent first step towards strengthening regional scientific networks among women. Based on session discussions and participant comments, there is clearly substantial interest in future conferences or fora for regional women scientists and engineers that the USG could help facilitate, but it will largely be up to the participants themselves to keep the momentum going. (Post thanks staff from OES and Embassy Amman for all of their help on logistics and organization both before and during the conference.)

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